USAID Evaluation News

A Newsletter on Recent Evaluation Findings and Methods

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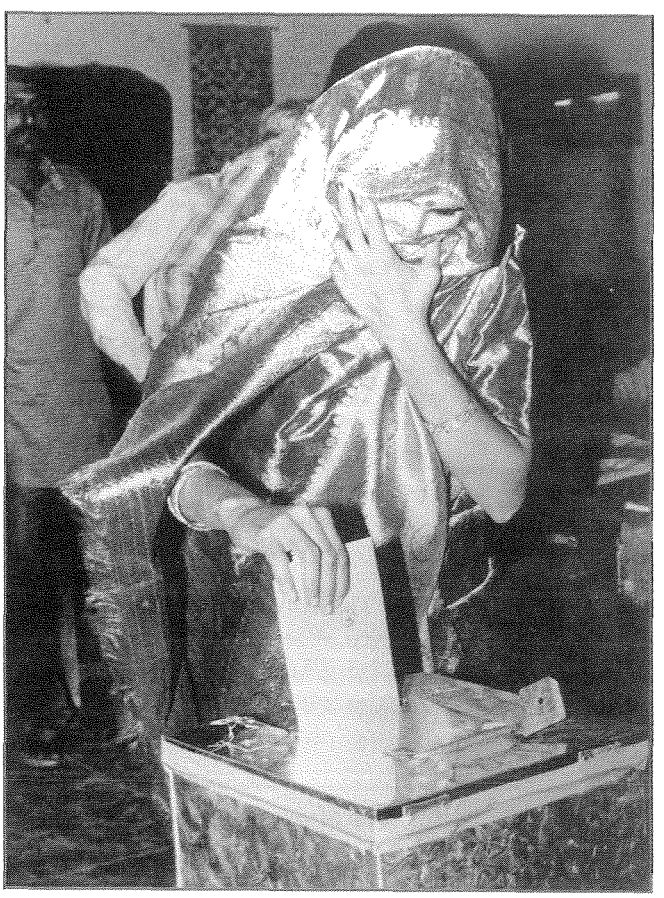
Focus on Democracy and Participation

Overview

This issue of *USAID Evaluation News* examines two themes of growing priority in the Agency—democracy and participation. Democracy has emerged recently as an area of emphasis, while USAID has practiced participatory development for decades, recently giving it renewed importance.

USAID's reengineering efforts stress close collaboration with partners and communication with customers. The Agency aims to work more closely with partners, especially private voluntary organizations and nongovernmental organizations, in delivering development assistance. Listening more closely to our customers is an avenue to improving the effectiveness of our aid programs.

Our growing experience with democracy programs is revealing links with participatory approaches to development. Efforts to improve elements of good governance—efficiency, accountability, and openness of democratic institutions—are only part of the democratization process. Equally important is a participatory civil society, in which indigenous groups or associations play public advocacy and reformist roles.



This Indian women casts her ballot, one of the most visible aspects of democracy. See articles inside on the many aspects USAID supports, from strengthening rule of law to promoting civic advocacy.

The Development Experience Review section includes articles on recent CDIE evaluations:

"Four Strategies Support Rule of Law," examines findings and strategic implications of an assessment of legal systems programs. The study examines the effectiveness of four basic strategies and issues of sequencing, pg. 2.

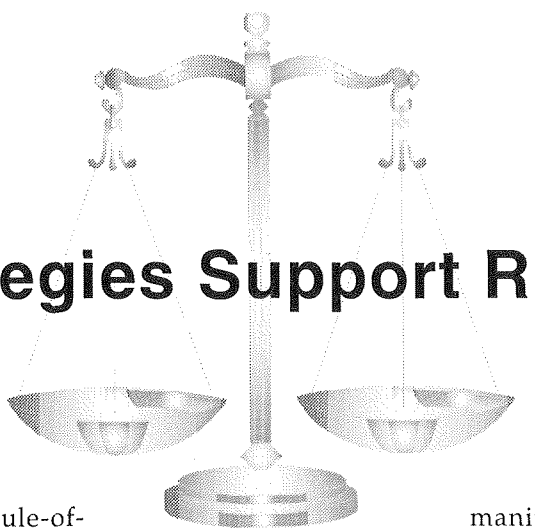
"Support for Civic Advocacy a 'Yes' Vote for Democracy," looks at results of donor efforts to strengthen civil society. It offers recommendations for setting priorities in different phases of the transition to democracy, pg. 7.

The third article shifts to "USAID's Partnerships," summarizing a review of USAID's working relationship with the PVO-NGO communities and making recommendations for improvement, pg. 10.

The Evaluation Methods section, "How to Conduct a Participatory Evaluation," discusses how participatory evaluation differs from traditional evaluation, gives its pros and cons, and provides step-by-step tips for conducting a participatory evaluation, pg. 12.

The News section offers short articles on: a USAID workshop on performance measurement of democracy programs, the launching of a new CDIE assessment of legislative strengthening programs, and a summary of research papers on democracy available from CDIE's Research and Reference Service (R&RS), pg. 16.

Development Experience Review



Four Strategies Support Rule of Law

By Ross Bankson

Better justice—that's the goal of the Agency's rule-of-law programs in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the new independent states of the former Soviet Union.

But what is justice? The concept has been debated in Western culture since at least the days of Plato's *Republic,* and it has a long history of controversy in other cultural settings as well. For present purposes, though, "better justice" lies in a system characterized by

- *Legitimacy* in the eyes of the citizenry
- *Accountability* to the citizenry—a process dependent on freedom of speech (including, of course, a vigilant press)
- *Autonomy* from control, manipulation, or interference from other branches of government or other elements in society
- *Fairness* for all citizens in the justice it provides
- *Effectiveness* in using resources to provide justice

Deciding on a Strategy

At the heart of rule-of-law (ROL) assistance is a hierarchy of four strategies. We'll examine them in detail momentarily. First, though, comes a fundamental decision. When considering reform efforts in any given country, a donor must ask at the outset, "Should rule-of-law support be offered here?" That is, does the situation meet the minimal criteria for

even *contemplating* a rule-of-law effort? The political environment may be so hostile to judicial reform that the answer would be a resounding "No."

If, however, the answer is "Yes—go ahead with ROL support," the donor then enters the hierarchy of strategies (see figure on page 6) and must address a series of additional questions. Logical progression runs from top to bottom. Does the political leadership support the rule of law? If the answer is no, a strategy of constituency and coalition building is called for (strategy 1). This strategy seeks to galvanize support of various groups—the media, for example, or the commercial sector.

If leadership support is healthy, then the answer is yes and the donor moves to the next item: Is the legal structure adequate? If no, then the need is for structural reform—that is, addressing the rules that govern the legal system, usually as reflected in the constitution and the laws (strategy 2).

If the legal structure is sound, the donor turns to the next question: Does the citizenry have full and equitable access to the legal system? If not, then the task is to increase accessibility (strategy 3) through such mechanisms as alternative dispute resolution.

Finally, if the first three criteria are alive and well, it comes down to a question of judicial capacity and performance. Are they adequate?

A "no" answer points to the need for strengthening the legal system (strategy 4). This strategy consists of such activities as training judges and lawyers, acquiring modern technology, and introducing new systems of administration, record keeping, and budget management.

The four strategies were the subject of a recent evaluation by USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation. Team members visited Argentina, Colombia, Honduras, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Uruguay to examine USAID programs along with activities funded by the Ford and Asia foundations.

The synthesis report, *Weighing In on the Scales of Justice*, by Gary Hansen, warns against using this framework *too* mechanically, since answers to such questions in the real world are seldom an absolute yes or no. But the framework should help planners weigh the situation more carefully and avoid commonplace errors made in the past, such as investing millions of dollars to strengthen formal judicial systems when political will for reform is absent.

Strategy 1

Constituency and Coalition Building

Until recently, constituency- and coalition-building strategies played only a minor role in donor ROL efforts. They were felt unnecessary. In the late 1980s it was assumed that the newly emerging democracies of Argentina, Honduras, the Philippines, and Uruguay would demonstrate the political will necessary to move directly to structural reform and legal system strengthening. It turned out, though, that most host government commitments to legal reform were weak and uncertain (Uruguay was the lone exception).

In Argentina and the Philippines it was possible to shift fairly quickly away from stalled efforts at structural reform and legal system strengthening. Efforts moved to constituency and coalition building aimed at increasing public pressure and political support for legal reform. USAID support helped

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Annette Binnendijk—Editor in Chief
Laurie Denton—Managing Editor
Ross Bankson—Senior Editor
Pamela McDade-Frankel—Production Editor

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mobilize nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and institute public-opinion surveys. In the Philippines, USAID also helped improve investigative journalism and legal reporting. Involving the media helps make the justice system more transparent and thus corruption more difficult to conceal.

Return on investment in constituency and coalition building can be large. Colombia reflects the importance of this strategy. There USAID undertook a protracted effort to bring together reformist elites. (Colombia was so beset by violence that the *will* for reform was strong. USAID's role was not to help mobilize a reform coalition but rather to nurture the coalition's growth.) The coalition became a leader in bringing major changes to the judiciary.

Strategy 2

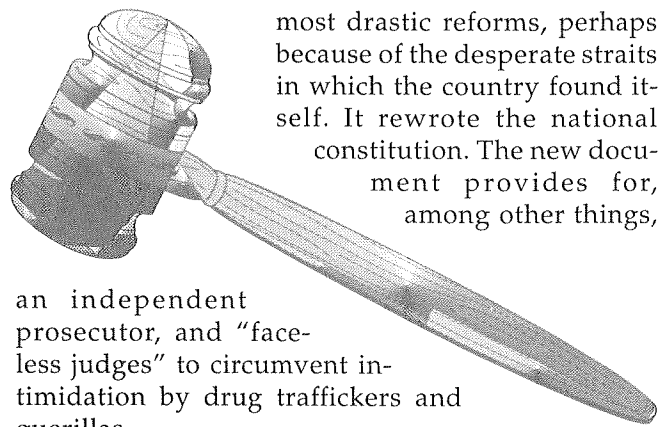
Structural Reform

Structural reform seeks to institute an independent and effective judiciary. That objective can entail altering in profound ways the basic rules governing the judicial system. Thus structural reform is perhaps the boldest and most difficult strategy, challenging as it does entrenched political interests.

Only in Uruguay was a consensus for legal reform already in place. Therefore the ROL enterprise could begin with structural reforms. Three major reforms took place. First, procedures in civil cases changed from written to oral. Second, a merit system of judicial recruitment was introduced. And third, 100 new judges were appointed, expanding the judiciary by a third.

Similar reforms, minus judicial expansion, took place in Argentina. In the Philippines a new 1987 constitution speeded up the trial process. The constitution also reformed a blatantly political basis for appointing judges and included guarantees against torture and political detention. A 1989 reform mandated continuous trials, requiring cases to be completed within 90 days of their first day in court.

In Sri Lanka, USAID and the Asia Foundation are encouraging greater discussion among social and political elites on constitutional change. The two organizations are also funding a university-based research center to undertake policy analysis to help parliamentary committees make informed decisions. Sri Lankan political power is concentrated among a small ruling elite, and activities of this type can be viewed as a kind of "venture capital" investment. Risks of failure are high, but potential returns far exceed the original cost.



Colombia undertook the most drastic reforms, perhaps because of the desperate straits in which the country found itself. It rewrote the national constitution. The new document provides for, among other things, an independent prosecutor, and "faceless judges" to circumvent intimidation by drug traffickers and guerillas.

Strategy 3

Access Creation

Rural and low-income urban populations tend to be woefully underserved by legal services. In several of the countries, however, donors have supported strategies that have helped make legal services more available and affordable to the poor. These efforts have included legal aid, alternative dispute resolution (ADR), legal literacy campaigns, and support for legal-advocacy NGOs.

ADR strategies are the most widespread. In five of the six countries (Honduras is the exception), USAID or the Asia Foundation is supporting ADR mechanisms designed to divert cases from the court system into mediation boards, neighborhood counseling centers, and binding arbitration schemes. Most measures are new, but they are showing promise as a low-cost way to provide rapid, accessible services for settling grievances.

Three countries (Argentina, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka) have received support for legal aid programs. This kind of approach can be effective, but it comes at a high cost in skilled legal staff time. A "retail" approach addressing individual cases is limited in scope.

More promising are legal literacy campaigns and paralegal services. These activities are most effective when developed around specific needs and linked to legal advocacy organizations that have the legal competence to engage in litigation. At present, legal-advocacy NGOs are providing representation only in the Philippines and Sri Lanka. These groups pack a double punch. They use the law aggressively to help the poor and disadvantaged. And their activities make them an important constituency for reform in general. Expansion is warranted.

Strategy 4

Legal System Strengthening

Of the four strategies, legal system strengthening is the bedrock of ROL development. But it is not the place to begin. If the other, earlier strategies are not in place, attempts to strengthen the legal system may yield little progress.

USAID and other donors have supported strategies for strengthening legal systems in all six countries. Activities have been directed toward introducing new systems of court administration, designing and conducting preentry and postentry training for judges and other personnel, and acquiring modern technology, such as computers, for case tracking.

In Uruguay and Colombia these activities have contributed to improvements in judicial performance. In Uruguay efforts at legal-system strengthening have included training judges in newly adopted oral procedures (replacing traditional—and time-consuming—written procedures). The Agency has also supported efficiency training for court administrators and helped streamline management of court records. In Colombia, revamped Public Order courts for terrorism cases have increased conviction rates to 70 percent from 30 percent. (The human rights consequences are as yet unknown.)

In Sri Lanka the Asia Foundation and USAID have concentrated on improving university law education. The Foundation is financing a project to write textbooks in 15 subjects. It has helped the law faculty at the University of Colombo reform curriculum. And it is supporting a legal aid clinic in which law students are required to participate—gaining practical grass-roots experience. This strategy (which meshes with strategy 1) seeks, among other things, to build a reform constituency within the legal community.

Elsewhere, progress has been more variable. In Honduras the Agency helped upgrade prosecutors' and public defenders skills, but inefficient judicial systems blunt their efforts. In Argentina efforts to improve the legal system failed at the national level but found a receptive audience in some provincial courts.

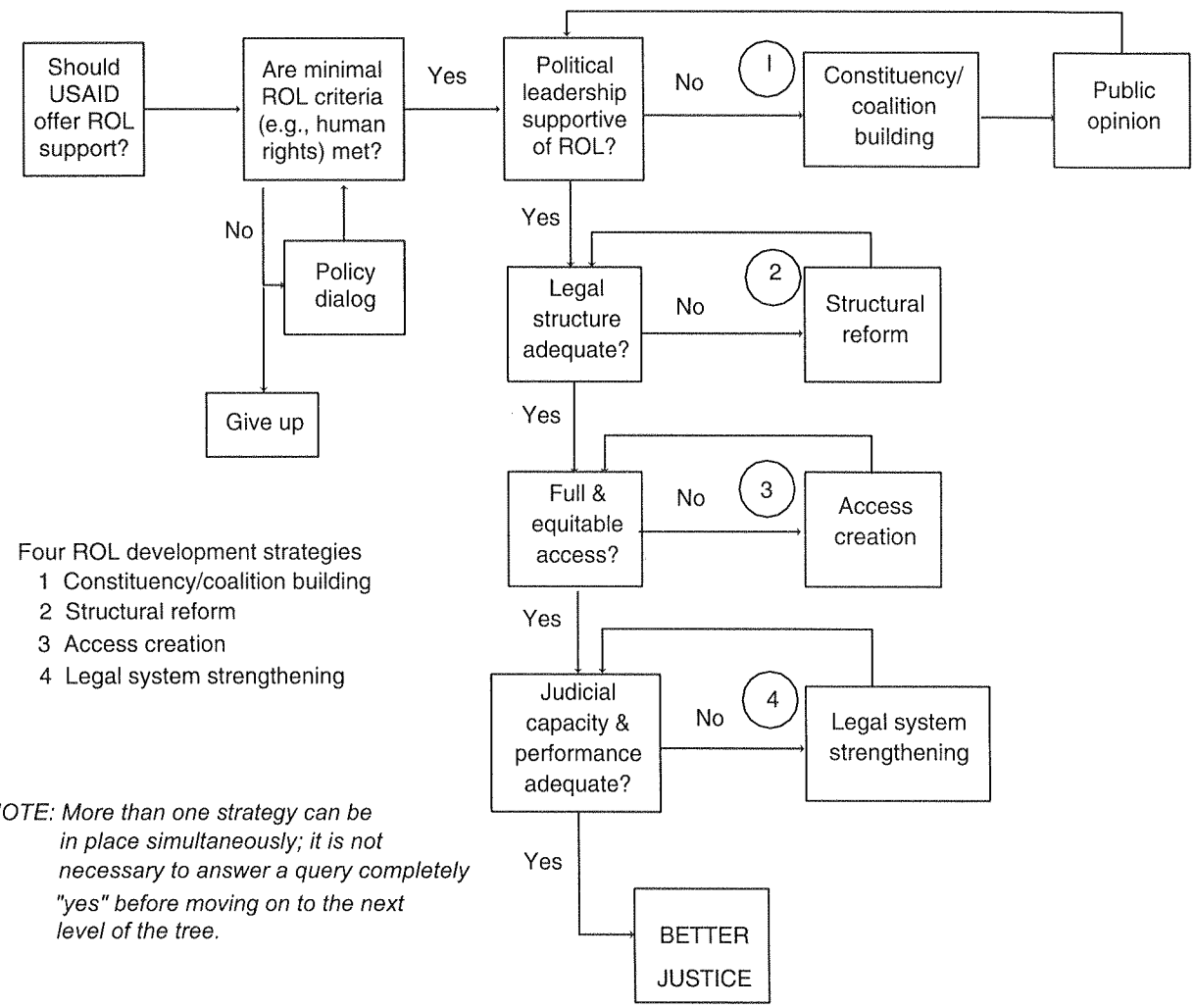
Strategic Implications

When formulating rule-of-law programs, donors should consider a range of strategic implications. Among them:

- In many countries, conditions favorable for a rule-of-law program will be marginally present. ROL efforts are not appropriate everywhere.
- In countries with both favorable and unfavorable conditions for reform, an initial strategy of constituency and coalition building may be needed before other strategies are introduced.
- Holding the justice system accountable for what it does is essential to democratic sustainability. The two most important ingredients are *active constituencies and coalitions* that demand better justice and a *free press* that can point to lapses in the system.
- The most popular instrument is alternative dispute resolution. Informal ADR mechanisms are usually a better investment than court reform.
- Strategies 1 and 3 concern *demand* for legal services and are thus political in nature. Instead of thinking bureaucratically (the norm) donors must learn to think politically.

This article is based on the synthesis report Weighing In on the Scales of Justice, Strategic Approaches for Donor-Supported Rule of Law Programs, *by Gary Hansen (February 1994), PN–AAX–280. For order information, see box on page 14.*

An Analytical Tree for Supporting Rule of Law Development



Four ROL development strategies
1 Constituency/coalition building
2 Structural reform
3 Access creation
4 Legal system strengthening

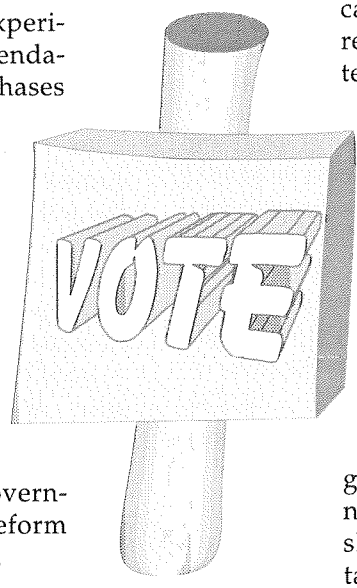
NOTE: More than one strategy can be in place simultaneously; it is not necessary to answer a query completely "yes" before moving on to the next level of the tree.

Support for Civic Advocacy a 'Yes' Vote for Democracy

By Laurie Denton

By strengthening civic advocacy groups—nongovernment organizations that champion government reform—donors can make a difference in countries moving toward democracy. Support for civil society is a core component of USAID's democracy and governance agenda, reflecting a growing realization of the value of autonomous centers of social and economic power to democracy. Promoting accountable, participatory governance, these groups are essential to keeping emerging democracies moving in the right direction. But determining which organizations to support, when, and how is no simple matter.

A new study by CDIE looks at donor experience in five countries and offers recommendations for setting priorities in different phases of the democratic transition. *Constituencies for Reform: Strategic Approaches for Donor-Supported Civic Advocacy Programs* assesses USAID and other donor investments in civil society in Bangladesh, Chile, El Salvador, Kenya, and Thailand.



What is it that civic advocacy groups do? They engage in public advocacy, analyze policy issues, mobilize constituencies in support of policy dialog, serve as watchdogs of government performance, and act as agents of reform in strengthening democratic governance.

The study found wide variation in the contributions such groups have made to democratic governance. What accounts for the differences? Earlier experience with democracy is a critical variable.

In Chile, for example, the country's experience with a relatively advanced democratic system provided the basis for mobilizing people to vote against the authoritarian regime of General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte in 1988. And in Thailand, which had a more fleeting experience with democracy in the 1970s and late 1980s, civic organizations mobilized a prodemocracy coalition to oppose a military government in 1992. But for Bangladesh, El Salvador, and Kenya, limited democratic experience meant there was no viable framework for civil society to fortify democratic transitions in the early 1990s.

The transition to democracy can be divided broadly into four phases: pretransition, early transition, late transition, and consolidation.

Pretransition

In this first phase, civic advocacy organizations generally operate in an environment of government repression and hostility. Donors should first aim to preserve civil society resources. One way to do that is by supporting safe havens where reformist groups can take refuge and internally exiled reformers can find employment, protection, and legal aid. In Chile, for instance, the Academy of Christian Humanism served as a cover for donor agencies seeking to support the social sciences, employed a good number of social scientists, and provided a meeting place for academic discourse.

Another task is defending the autonomy of civic advocacy groups. Authoritarian governments generally are aware that nongovernmental organizations may shelter reformist elements and may take steps to weaken and control them. A third task is to cultivate a dialog in the reformist community to develop consensus on reform agendas and strategies.

Early Transition

This begins when an authoritarian regime concedes in some demonstrable way that legitimate rule depends on popular consent and rival political elites seek a consensus for a more open political system. Free elections are held and constitutional reforms are adopted that provide the legal basis for a new democratic order. Most countries where USAID has programs are in this phase, which is critical in laying foundations for a new democratic order.

With some liberalization, civic groups can go about the initial task of educating and mobilizing public support for fundamental political reforms. They must be prepared to act with vigor, though, as events may move rapidly. Donors can provide technical and financial assistance to organizations involved in voter education and registration, and election monitoring and administration.

In Chile seven elections took place in five years—all of them crucial in laying the foundation for restoring democratic governance. Several civic advocacy organizations received USAID support to organize voter registration and education campaigns and train 5,000 electoral officials and party representatives working in voting centers. This contributed significantly to Chile's peaceful democratic transition.

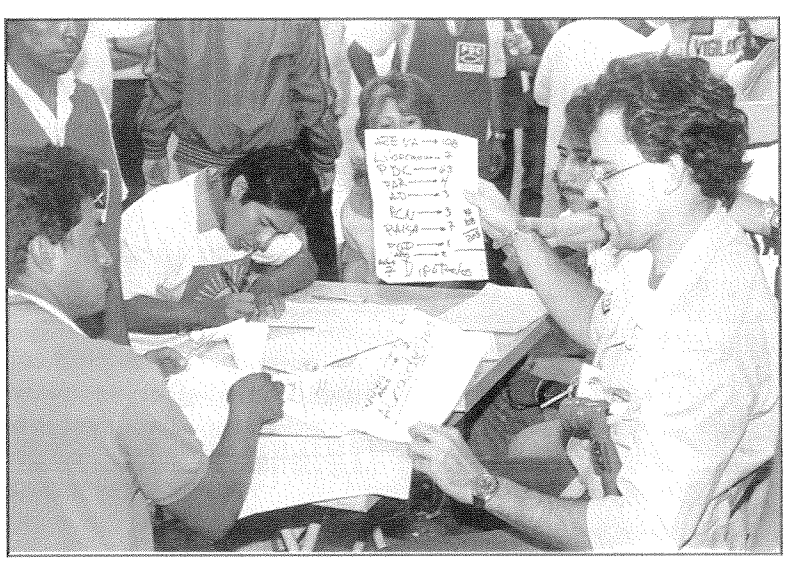
Another task is to build a support network for fundamental political reform beyond the activist organizations that survived state repression in the pretransition era. Labor unions, women's organizations, student unions, or professional associations may be sources of support and alliance at local and national levels. Mobilizing such groups behind a common reform agenda can provide the public visibility and weight needed in negotiations with the government. In Thailand, for instance, the People's Constitutional Assembly, organized by a group of reformist organizations in 1992, hammered together a unified platform that was reflected in the government's proposed constitutional amendments. Donors can encourage dialog by funding nonpartisan organizations seeking to provide a neutral ground where opposing elites come together on reform issues.

A third task is creating an environment conducive to the growth, autonomy, and contributions of civil society. A legacy of authoritarian controls undermines the institutional mechanisms and arenas that civil society uses to engage the public and the state. In early transition donors should support efforts to enhance the autonomy of the media and universities, revitalize the judicial system and municipal councils, and introduce mechanisms (recall, referenda, right to petition, and use of public hearings) civic advocacy organizations can use to advance reform.

Late Transition

At this stage a fundamental redirection of a more open political system is under way. New rules for governance have been agreed on. Now the task is ensuring conformity to the rules.

In this phase, a major task of civic advocacy organizations is education. This includes instructing the public on the rules and institutional features of the new political order, the means by which citizens can influence government, how they can seek redress against arbitrary government actions, and how to take advantage of new opportunities in community empowerment and governance. Civic education should create and strengthen public expectations that hold government and political actors accountable to higher standards of behavior.



Tallying up: Election officials in El Salvador count votes in a ballot for local and national office. Emerging from 12 years of guerrilla warfare, the country is making strides in democratic governance.

A second task is monitoring compliance with the rules for governance. Lack of enforcement is all too common in developing countries, but civic advocacy organizations can help by assuming a watchdog role, discovering and publicizing infractions.

A third task involves building government and civil society partnerships. In Chile and Thailand, for example, business associations have supported governance reforms by financing improvements and streamlining procedures in public agencies that service business.

Donor strategies in this phase include technical assistance to organizations engaged in civic education and monitoring, and facilitating partnerships with government agencies. Donors can also help

organizations that champion the cause of disempowered groups (such as labor and women) that may be on the margins of the political arena.

Consolidation

This phase features a deepening of democratic governance in the culture and a growing capacity of society and government to adapt to change and deal with problems of reform.

An underlying issue concerns the sustainability of civic advocacy organizations, particularly public interest organizations that advocate reforms and address issues of the larger public good. Such organizations are necessary for society to problem-solve effectively. Left to individuals, many of these issues might not be addressed, because costs outweigh potential benefits for the individual. Unless society establishes incentives to support these organizations, they will most likely not be financially sustainable.

Recommendations

The four-phase transition scheme provides a basis for advancing the following recommendations on priorities and the sequencing of donor investments:

1. **Donors need to follow a rigorous strategic regimen to ensure their investments do not lose their relevance to the reform process.** Investments in civic advocacy groups can easily be dissipated over activities that may yield minimal results. Such a regimen should concentrate on attaining structural reforms in the polity and then be sequenced on the basis of the transition phase under way.

2. **Donors need to be prepared to exercise considerable leverage in the pre- and early-transition *phases.*** During these phases, civic advocacy organizations are often not strong enough to move reform forward alone. The weight of donor collaboration to pressure for political liberalization may be critical.

3. **Donors need to exercise caution when investing in institution building in civil society during the early phases.** Many civic advocacy organizations are small, with a few staff and a charismatic leader. There may be little internal democracy or leadership turnover; links with potential partners or constituencies may be tenuous. Because of their fragile base, many will either cease to exist as their leaders move into government positions or affiliate with and be submerged in resurgent political parties.

4. **Donors need to devote more attention to building a policy environment favorable to the growth of civil society, particularly in expanding in-country funding sources.** Most civic advocacy organizations depend on donor financing. Creating an environment that invites contributions—by changing tax laws, for instance—is one way to promote financial sustainability. Another, which USAID pioneered, is funding host-country endowments and foundations. It helps to be creative. In Thailand, for example, the Asia Foundation is helping establish a "green" mutual fund that will invest in Thai companies that observe environmental standards. Part of the earnings will go to groups pressing for environmental causes.

5. **To defend programs from premature termination, donors should develop policy guidelines that establish criteria for a country to graduate from receiving democracy aid.** In current thinking, rapid progress toward self-sustaining economic growth often justifies cutbacks in or even termination of assistance, although countries may be in the early phases of a democratic transition.

It may make sense to continue some support for democracy efforts even though economic development programs have ended. Potential for political regression and instability persists in the early phase and could undermine investor confidence and hard-won economic gains. Given the low cost of democracy programs, such investments may yield sizable benefits, politically and economically.

6. **Donors need to be aware of potential trade-offs in countries undergoing political transitions while engaging in fundamental economic reforms in the move to free-market economies.** Many countries undergo economic and political reform simultaneously, although at different speeds. When a ruling coalition demonstrates commitment to painful economic reforms, it may be appropriate to support civic organizations that can help champion and consolidate these reforms. Economic reforms can contribute to development of an autonomous commercial sector, which can advocate for and advance good governance.

This article is based on the synthesis report Constituencies for Reform: Strategic Approaches for Donor Supported Civic Advocacy Programs, *by Gary Hansen, March 1996. For order information, see box on page 14.*

USAID's Partnerships

by
Laurie Denton

Grass-roots citizens' groups are essential players in the development process. That means more and stronger partnerships between USAID and U.S. private voluntary organizations (PVOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) indigenous to the countries where the Agency operates.

A recent assessment of USAID's working relationship with the PVO–NGO communities finds room for improvement. *Strengthening the Public–Private Partnership: An Assessment of USAID's Management of PVO and NGO Activities* reports the findings of interviews with 259 PVO, NGO, and USAID staff in eight countries and in the United States and outlines suggestions for improving the way USAID does business with PVOs and NGOs.

Grants and Cooperative Agreements

Inconsistent use of funding instruments. The study found inconsistency in USAID's use of its funding instruments. Grants and cooperative agreements seem to be managed in the same way, with USAID project officers imposing similar controls for each.

"It depends on the project officer." One NGO had two concurrent Mission-funded cooperative agreements in the same area. One project officer was supportive and cooperative, the other micromanaged the project. Project success depends heavily on project officers' management style and relationship with the implementer, interviewees said.

Recommendations

Reinforce collaborative management. Senior managers should emphasize collaboration and develop an incentive system that rewards supportive, results-oriented project officers for excellence in working with NGOs and PVOs. To ensure consistency, additional training should be provided in applying USAID regulations and procedures to the funding instruments. And managers should consider developing a certification program to ensure that project officers have the knowledge and skills needed to manage PVO–NGO activities.

Policies and Procedures

Requirements for registration are unclear. NGOs appear to have a more difficult time registering than do PVOs, particularly in meeting accounting and financial management requirements. Many interviewees did not understand the purpose of USAID registration or when organizations must register. However, funds are available for unregistered organizations, so registration is not a stumbling block to receive funding.

Financial requirements: burden and boon. Many PVOs and NGOs said the Agency's financial reporting requirements are excessive and time consuming. However, many NGOs report their financial management systems improved as a result of having to meet Agency requirements.

Limited attention to NGO capacity building. Few donors consistently emphasize NGO capacity building. Instead they give grants for specific projects or

activities. But USAID can use umbrella grants to a lead organization that makes subgrants to offer opportunities for networking and capacity building.

Recommendations

Simplify registration, clarify OMB requirements, and consider using more donor consortia for NGOs. Senior managers should review and simplify registration requirements for NGOs and consider direct Mission registration (instead of through USAID/Washington). They should also review OMB requirements to determine which needn't be applied to indigenous NGOs. Another positive step would be to join or establish country-level donor consortia, which would provide more funding options to indigenous NGOs while allowing them to streamline reporting requirements.

Implementation

Strategic collaboration needs strengthening. Both PVOs and NGOs would like to be more involved in developing USAID's global and country strategies. Recently, the Agency's climate for collaboration has improved dramatically. Similarly, both see beneficiary participation in project design and implementation as central to project success.

"Both PVOs and NGOs would like to be more involved in developing USAID's global and country strategies."

One contact person preferable. Well-developed activity designs, work plans, and budgets, and collaborative, competent USAID and implementer staff were rated as key factors to project success. Implementers say they would rather deal with just one USAID contact person during project implementation, preferably the project officer. Similarly, interviewees found that negotiations go most smoothly when the Agency uses a team approach or when there is a single contact, as opposed to successive negotiating sessions with different USAID staff.

Recommendations

Tap PVO–NGO expertise, and establish a single point of contact. Senior managers can strengthen partnerships by consulting with PVOs and NGOs in developing USAID's global and country strategies. They can also improve communications by setting up one contact, preferably the project officer. They should encourage a team approach in the Mission for project design, negotiation, and implementation.

Project Management

Regular project evaluations are important. Many organizations said they would like USAID to stress the importance of (and pay for) regular evaluations.

Regulations are too complex for small organizations. Many NGOs said they receive little or no administrative orientation before or during project implementation.

Pre-award reviews can save time. Consistent use of pre-award reviews would help the Agency determine management capabilities of potential funding recipients and could lessen the need for extensive implementation reviews and approvals.

USAID's strengths are its in-country presence and its direct funding of indigenous NGO activities. Many NGOs asked for Agency help in sponsoring or encouraging PVO–NGO networks that increase opportunities for collaboration, information exchange, and professional development.

Recommendations

Help strengthen indigenous NGOs and support capacity building of NGOs and PVOs. For NGOs: encourage development of PVO–NGO networks, use more support grants for broad portfolios, use pre-award reviews to strengthen financial management, and include funds for evaluations in activity budgets. For PVOs and NGOs: include capacity-building activities as program outcomes or intermediate results, better educate the organizations about minimum accountability requirements and the differences in funding instruments.

The full report, Strengthening the Public–Private Partnership: An Assessment of USAID's Management of PVO and NGO Activities, *by Patricia L. Jordan, is forthcoming from CDIE and can be ordered from the DISC. An eight-page Highlights version of the report, Highlights No. 50, with the same title, PN–ABS–517, is also available from the DISC. For order information, see box on page 14.*

Evaluation Methods

Conducting a Participatory Evaluation

by Annette Binnendijk, CDIE

As part of reengineering, USAID is promoting participation and customer focus in all aspects of its development work. This article outlines how to conduct a particpatory evaluation.

What Is Participatory Evaluation?

Participatory evaluation provides for active involvement in the evaluation process of those with a stake in the program: providers, partners, beneficiaries, and any other interested parties. Participation typically takes place throughout all phases of the evaluation: planning and design; gathering and analyzing the data; identifying the evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations; disseminating results; and preparing an action plan to improve program performance.

Characteristics of Participatory Evaluation

Participatory evaluations typically share several characteristics that set them apart from traditional evaluation approaches. These include

Stakeholder focus and ownership. Participatory evaluations are primarily oriented to the information needs of program providers and beneficiaries rather than of the donor agency. The donor agency simply helps the participants conduct their own evaluations, thus building their ownership and commitment to the results and facilitating their follow-up action.

Scope of participation. The range of participants included and the roles they play may vary. For example, some participatory evaluations may target only program providers or beneficiaries, while others may include the full array of stakeholders.

Stakeholder negotiations. Participating groups meet to communicate and negotiate to reach a consensus on evaluation findings, solve problems, and make plans to improve performance.

Diversity of views. Views of all participants are sought and recognized. More powerful stakeholders allow participation of the less powerful.

Learning process. The process is a learning experience for participants. Emphasis is on identifying lessons learned that will help participants improve program implementation, as well as on assessing whether targets were achieved.

Flexible design. While some preliminary planning for the evaluation may be necessary, design issues are decided (as much as possible) in the participatory process. Generally, evaluation questions and data collection and analysis methods are determined by the participants, not by outside evaluators.

Empirical orientation. Good participatory evaluations are based on empirical data. Typically, rapid appraisal techniques are used to determine what happened and why (see box). Qualitative and quantitative data are gathered and used.

Use of facilitators. Participants actually conduct the evaluation, not outside evaluators as is traditional. However, one or more outside experts usually serve as facilitator—that is, mentor, trainer, group processor, negotiater, and methodologist.

Why Conduct a Participatory Evaluation?

Experience has shown that participatory evaluations improve program performance. Listening to and learning from program beneficiaries, field staff, and other stakeholders who know why a program is or is not working is critical to making improvements. Also, the more these insiders are involved in identifying evaluation questions and in gathering and analyzing data, the more likely they are to use the information to improve performance. Participatory evaluation empowers program providers and beneficiaries to act on the knowledge gained.

Advantages to participatory evaluations are that they

- Examine relevant issues by involving key players in evaluation design
- Promote participants' learning about the program and its performance and enhance their understanding of other stakeholders' points of view
- Improve participants' evaluation skills
- Mobilize stakeholders, enhance teamwork, and build shared commitment to act on evaluation recommendations
- Increase likelihood that evaluation information will be used to improve performance

But there may be disadvantages. For example, participatory evaluations may

- Be viewed as less objective because program staff, customers, and other stakeholders with possible vested interests participate
- Be less useful in addressing highly technical aspects
- Require considerable time and resources to identify and involve a wide array of stakeholders
- Take staff away from ongoing activities
- Be dominated and misused by some stakeholders to further their own interests

Steps in Conducting a Participatory Evaluation

Step 1. ***Decide if a participatory evaluation approach is appropriate.*** Participatory evaluations are especially useful when there are questions about implementation difficulties or program effects on beneficiaries, or when information is wanted on stakeholders' knowledge of program goals or their views of progress. Traditional evaluation approaches may be more suitable when there is a need for independent outside judgment, when specialized information is needed that only technical experts can provide, when stakeholders don't have time to participate, or when such serious lack of agreement exists among stakeholders that a collaborative approach is likely to fail.

Step 2. ***Decide on the degree of participation.*** What groups will participate and what roles will they play? Participation may be broad, with a wide array of program staff, beneficiaries, partners, and others. It may, alternatively, target one or two of these groups. For example, if the aim is to uncover what hinders program implementation, field staff

Rapid Appraisal Methods

Key informant interviews. This involves interviewing 15 to 35 individuals selected for their knowledge and experience in a topic of interest. Interviews are qualitative, in-depth, and semi-structured. They rely on interview guides that list topics or open-ended questions. The interviewer subtly probes the informant to elicit information, opinions, and experiences.

Focus group interviews. In these, 8 to 12 carefully selected participants freely discuss issues, ideas, and experiences among themselves. A moderator introduces the subject, keeps the discussion going, and tries to prevent domination of the discussion by a few participants. Focus groups should be homogeneous, with participants of similar backgrounds as much as possible.

Community group interviews. These take place at public meetings open to all community members. The primary interaction is between the participants and the interviewer, who presides over the meeting and asks questions, following a carefully prepared questionnaire.

Direct observation. Using a detailed observation form, observers record what they see and hear at a program site. The information may be about physical surroundings or about ongoing activities, processes, or discussions.

Minisurveys. These are usually based on a structured questionnaire with a limited number of mostly close-ended questions. They are usually administered to 25 to 50 people. Respondents may be selected through probability or nonprobability sampling techniques, or on "convenience" sampling. The major advantage of minisurveys is that the data can be collected and analyzed within a few days. It is the only rapid appraisal method that generates quantitative data.

Case studies. Case studies record anecdotes that illustrate a program's shortcomings or accomplishments. They tell about incidents or concrete events, often from one person's experience.

Village imaging. This involves groups of villagers drawing maps or diagrams to identify and visualize problems and solutions.

may need to be involved. If the issue is a program's effect on local communities, beneficiaries may be the most appropriate participants. If the aim is to know if all stakeholders understand a program's goals and view progress similarly, broad participation may be best.

Roles may range from serving as a resource or informant to participating fully in some or all phases of the evaluation.

Step 3. ***Prepare the evaluation scope of work.*** Consider the evaluation approach—the basic methods, schedule, logistics, and funding. Special attention should go to defining roles of the outside facilitator and various stakeholders. As much as possible, decisions such as the evaluation questions to be addressed and the development of data collection instruments and analysis plans should be left to the participatory process rather than be predetermined in the scope of work.

Step 4. ***Conduct the team planning meeting.*** Typically, the participatory evaluation process begins with a workshop of the facilitator and participants. The purpose is to build consensus on the aim of the evaluation; refine the scope of work and clarify roles and responsibilities of the participants and facilitator; review the schedule, logistical arrangements, and agenda; and train participants in basic data collection and analysis. Assisted by the facilitator, participants identify the evaluation questions they want answered. The approach taken to identify questions may be open ended or may stipulate broad areas of inquiry. Participants then select appropriate methods and develop data-gathering instruments and analysis plans needed to answer the questions.

Step 5. ***Conduct the evaluation.*** Participatory evaluations seek to maximize stakeholders' involvement in conducting the evaluation in order to promote learning. Participants define the questions, consider the data collection skills, methods, and commitment of time and labor required. Participatory evaluations usually use rapid appraisal techniques, which are simpler, quicker, and less costly than conventional sample surveys. They include all the methods described in the box on page 13.

Typically, facilitators are skilled in these methods, and they help train and guide other participants in their use.

Step 6. ***Analyze the data and build consensus on results.*** Once the data are gathered, participatory approaches to analyzing and interpreting them help participants build a common body of knowledge. After the analysis is complete, facilitators work with participants to reach consensus on findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Facilitators may need to negotiate among stakeholder groups if disagreements emerge. Developing a common understanding of the results, on the basis of empirical evidence, becomes the cornerstone for group commitment to a plan of action.

Step 7. ***Prepare an action plan.*** Facilitators work with participants to prepare an action plan to improve program performance. The knowledge shared by participants about a program's strengths and weaknesses is turned into action. Empowered by knowledge, participants become agents of change and apply the lessons they have learned to improve performance.

Ordering Information

CDIE documents referred to in this newsletter can be ordered from the DISC, 1611 N. Kent Street, Suite 200, Arlington, VA 22209–2111; telephone (703) 351–4006; fax (703) 351–4039; Internet docorder@disc.mhs.compuserve.com.

News

Workshop Advances Democracy Performance Measurement

by Boyd Kowal, CDIE

For several years USAID Missions have struggled with specifying performance measures for their democracy objectives. Democracy is a complex and relatively new sector for the Agency. It is not yet well defined and does not lend itself easily to measurement. Unavailability of data has been a further obstacle to measuring progress.

Other donors and academicians face similar difficulties. A two-day workshop in May 1995 sought to tackle these problems. The workshop was sponsored by CDIE, the Office of Sector Advisers, and the Global Bureau's Democracy and Governance Center.

Workshop Participants and Format

About 80 people working on assessing democracy programs represented USAID Missions and Washington offices, other U.S. Government agencies, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and contractors. There were two *plenary* and three *breakout* sessions. Most work was done in the breakout sessions, where participants split into groups representing the four Agency democracy objectives. They met for three sessions to develop performance measures.

Results, Challenges, and Issues

Defining democracy and its parts. Participants generally accepted the four objectives as a useful working definition, but they debated their components. That debate contributed to refining the democracy strategic framework.

Identifying performance measures. The groups produced about 150 candidate indicators. The workshop emphasized *quantitative* indicators but produced qualitative measures as well.

Measuring performance at different levels. Participants discussed indicators at the Agency and Mission levels, and their data requirements. At the Agency level, performance indicators reflect long-term country changes. Although related to USAID programs, these changes may not be directly attributable to them. At the Mission level, objectives should be more directly attributable to programs, and indicators should more clearly measure program progress. Participants discussed the difficulties, especially in democracy, of identifying common measures that could "roll up" or aggregate Mission-level results across countries. A chief constraint is that Mission indicators measure only a small part of country changes and activities.

Clarifying data collection responsibilities. Missions will continue their data collection as before. Data on Agency-level measures will be either from secondary sources or primary data collections conducted by USAID/Washington.

Next Steps

Staff from all sections of USAID/Washington identified and initiated several follow-up activities:

- Document performance measures produced
- Modify the democracy strategic framework in light of workshop suggestions
- Continue to develop performance measures and share them with participants
- Draw up a performance measurement handbook to help Mission staff develop or select democracy performance indicators
- Launch an effort to identify secondary data sources, particularly for Agency-level measures
- Maintain workshop contacts to expand and refine democracy performance measures.

For more information, contact the PME Hotline, by typing "Hotline" in the USAID e-mail address list and selecting "PME Hotline@CDIE.PME@AIDW."

CDIE launches series on legislative strengthening

by Jan Emmert, CDIE

The Center for Development Information and Evaluation is carrying out an assessment of legislative strengthening programs of USAID and other donors. It is part of a new series of impact evaluations that relies heavily on U.S. direct-hire evaluators and aims for fast publication turn-around of country studies.

The assessment follows two recent studies of major components of USAID's democracy agenda: rule of law and civil society (see articles on pages 2, 7).

From August through October 1995 CDIE sent teams, composed primarily of US direct-hire personnel, for two weeks each to Bolivia, El Salvador, Nepal, and the Philippines.

Two reports— Philippines and Bolivia—are available. The Nepal and El Salvador reports will be issued shortly. A synthesis report, providing guidance for policy and field programs, will be prepared this spring.

Research on democracy available from R&RS

What's the latest on alternative dispute resolution? What are regional bureaus doing to combat corruption? This type of information and more is available from the Research and Reference Services Democracy and Governance Core Research Staff, a project of CDIE's Development Information office. This project searches commercial databases and the Internet, contacts academic and NGO experts in the United States, and works with other donor organizations to prepare reports and answer individual requests for information.

Recently, the staff have analyzed information on public hearings and their connection to democracy programming for a municipal development project in Central America; identified lessons learned in legislative strengthening from USAID project information for a project design team in a Middle East Mission; compared ways that countries vet supreme court justices and oust corrupt and inept appointed judges for some LAC Missions; and researched media advocacy activities similar to the Filipino "Barefoot Media" initiative for a Mission in Asia.

Other research topics include

- Preventive diplomacy
- Civic education
- Elections
- Postwar reconstruction
- Police training
- Transitions to democracy
- Decentralization
- Human rights monitors
- Constitutional reforms
- Democracy and governance performance indicators
- Municipal development

And staff researchers have prepared reports and issue briefs on the following:

Civil Society Bibliography: With Annotations, Heather S. McHugh, January 1994 (PN-ABU-255).

Efforts in Ethnic Conflict Resolution: Preliminary Lessons Learned, Heather S. McHugh, December 1994 (PN-ABU-375).

Fostering a Farewell to Arms: Preliminary Lessons Learned in Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants. Kimberly Mahling Clark, forthcoming.

USAID and Legislative Strengthening: A Synthesis of Relevant Materials, Ryan S. McCannell, May 1995, (PN-ABW-455).

USAID and Alternative Dispute Resolution: The Democratization of USAID? Heather S. McHugh, forthcoming.

The Relationship between Democracy and Sustainability: A Disengaged Process, Heather S. McHugh, May 1995 (PN-ABW-062).

USAID and Democratic Development: A Synthesis of Literature and Experience, Michele Wozniak Schimpp, May 1992 (PN-ABG-803).

USAID and Elections Support: A Synthesis of Case Study Materials, Michele Wozniak Schimpp and Lisa Petterson, May 1993 (PN-ABP-957).